

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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O R 091552Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6202

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0717

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: FRANGIE VISIT TO DAMASCUS

1. SUMMARY: JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING VISIT OF FRANGIE TO DAMASCUS FEBRUARY 7 INCLUDED SYRIAN "GUARANTEE" THAT TERMS OF CAIRO AGREEMENT BETWEEN PLO AND GOL WOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. PUBLISHED ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF VISIT OTHERWISE LACKING BUT IT SERVED AT LEAST TO CONSECRATE IMAGE OF WILLING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANESE PRESIDENT SPENT SEVEN HOURS HERE FEBRUARY 7, FOUR AND ONE-HALF OF WHICH WERE DEVOTED TO TALKS BETWEEN HIMSELF AND ASAD IN PRESENCE OF A FEW AIDES. THE ONLY OTHER EVENT ON HIS CALENDAR WAS A LUNCHEON ATTENDED BY CABINET AND DIPLOMATIC CORP. AT DAMASCUS AIRPORT, THE SYRIANS THIS TIME DID NOT TURN OUT THE APPLAUDING CLAQUE OF YOUNG MEN WHO OFTEN, BUT NOT ALWAYS, MATERIALIZE IN
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GOVERNMENT BUSES AT TIMES OF CHIEFS OF STATE VISITS TO

DAMASCUS. POPULACE IGNORED THE VISIT BUT THAT, TOO, IS NORMAL FOR THIS BLASE CAPITAL. FRANGIE'S RECEPTION IN ALL OTHER RESPECTS PARALLELED THAT GIVEN ASAD DURING HIS JANUARY 1975 MEETING WITH FRANGIE AT CHTAURA. CORDIAL, EVEN JOKING, ATMOSPHERE PREVAILED AT HEAD TABLE AT LUNCH, ALTHOUGH NEITHER PRESIDENT IS KNOWN FOR HIS GIFT AT REPARTEE.

3. PRESIDENTS POINTEDLY DID NOT ISSUE FORMAL COMMUNIQUE BUT SUMMED UP THEIR MEETING IN A "JOINT PRESS STATEMENT" WHICH EXPRESSED THEIR MUTUAL PLEASURE AT SETTLEMENT OF LEBANON'S CRISIS. STATED THEIR MEETING HAD EXAMINED WAYS TO ASSURE PEACE AND LEBANESE NATIONAL UNITY AS BASIS FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS SOUGHT BY ALL LEBANESE FACTIONS. STATEMENT STRESSED FRANGIE AND ASAD HAD ALSO REVIEWED MEETINGS HELD WITH PLO TO IMPLEMENT CAIRO AGREEMENT. SYRIA, IN ONLY NOTEWORTHY PORTION OF STATEMENT, AFFIRMED IT HAD GUARANTEED APPLICATION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT IN SPIRIT AND LETTER.

4. DEPUTY PRIMIN HAYDAR ADVISED AMBASSADOR AT FRANGIE'S LUNCHEON THAT HE BELIEVED SYRIA SHOULD NOW FOCUS ON DISARMING BOTH THE LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN POPULATIONS IN LEBANON, AS SYRIA HAD DONE WITHIN ITS OWN COUNTRY. PERMITTING INDIVIDUALS TO CARRY ARMS PUBLICLY, HE INSISTED, MUST COME TO SWIFT END IF PEACE IS TO BE PRESERVED. ACKNOWLEDGING THIS COULD STIR UP SUSPICIONS OF LEBANESE FACTIONS AND THAT ARMS' CARRYING WAS AN ANCIENT LEBANESE VIRTUE, HAYDAR NOTED THAT AS TRANSITIONAL STEP ARMS COULD BE COLLECTED INTO WAREHOUSES UNDER CONTROL OF RESPECTIVE POLITICAL PARTIES AND/OR RELIGIOUS GROUPS. (COMMENT: HAYDAR HAS NOT BEEN ONE OF SYRIA'S MEDIATORS IN BEIRUT AND DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN TALKS WITH FRANGIE. WE DO NOT RULE OUT HOWEVER, THAT HIS IDEA MAY REPRESENT ONE ELEMENT IN APPROACH OF SYRIAN LEADERSHIP.)

5. SYRIAN MEDIA HAD FIELD DAY WITH FRANGIE VISIT. IN RARE, IMPROMPTU PRESS CONFERENCE ASAD GAVE AT AIRPORT AFTER SEEING FRANGIE OFF, AFTER IMPORTUNINGS OF LEBANESE REPORTERS, PRESIDENT SAID THAT THERE WAS NO PRESENT NEED TO DISCUSS A CONFIDENTIAL

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TRIPARTITE POLITICAL-MILITARY COMMAND BETWEEN SYRIA AND LEBANON AND PALESTINIANS "SINCE COOPERATION BETWEEN US IS SATISFACTORY." (COMMENT: CONSIDERING THAT ELEVEN MONTHS HAVE ELAPSED SINCE ASAD OFFERED THE PLO AN AS YET UNACCEPTED JOINT POLITICAL-MILITARY COMMAND, HIS RELUCTANCE TO BROADEN HIS OFFER TO A TRIPARTITE ARRANGEMENT IS UNDERSTANDABLE.) IN REPLY TO QUESTION WHETHER HE HAD GOTTEN WRITTEN PLEDGE FROM PLO TO OBSERVE CAIRO AGREEMENT, ASAD BLANDLY REPLIED THAT PLEDGE WAS

NOT AT ISSUE AS MUCH AS WERE COOPERATION AND SOLIDARITY
"BETWEEN ALL TO WORK FOR JOINT INTEREST OF ALL."

6. ON AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 8 ASAD HELD LONG MEETING WITH
ARAFAT AND PLO EX-COMM. IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT MEETING FOCUSES
ON LEBANESE SITUATION AND POSITIVE RESULTS GAINED TO DATE WHICH
FRANGIE VIST TO DAMASCU HAD CONFIRMED.

7. COMMENT: FRANGIE VISIT HELPED PUT BEST POSSIBLE
FACE ON SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN SETTling LEBANESE
CRISIS. VISIT OBSERVED ALL NICETIES OF PROTOCOL AND THERE WAS
NO UNDERTONE THAT FRANGIE WAS BEING PARADED IN
DAMASCUS AS PRIZE EXHIBIT IN ASAD'S "ROMAN TRIUMPH." THERE
APPEARS TO BE SOBER AWARENESS IN SYRIAN LEADERSHIP
CIRCLE OF THE MANY COMPLEX PROBLEMS REQUIRING SOLUTION
BEFORE LEBANON CAN EXPECT TO RETURN TO ANYTHING LIKE
NORMALCY. WE ARE ALREADY HEARING ASSUMPTION THAT
PRESENCE OF PLA FORCES IN LEBANON MAY BE PROLONGED FOR
PERHAPS TWO MONTHS IN VIEW FACT THERE IS NO QUICK WAY TO
RECONSTITUTE LEBANESE PUBLIC SECURITY FORCES AND MILITARY.

8. TODAY WE HEARD RADIO ISRAEL REPORT UNSOURCED PRESS SPEC-
ULATION THAT SYRIA IS ENGINEERING CLOSER TIES WITH
LEBANON AS PART OF ITS INTEREST IN RESTORATION OF
"GREATER SYRIA." AMBITIONS OF THIS LEADERSHIP, WE
CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, ARE CONSIDERABLE MORE MODEST. BY
ITS MONOPOLIZATION OF MEDIATION IN BEIRUT, HOWEVER, SYRIA HAS
UNDOUBTEDLY PRESERVED AND ENHANCED ITS BIG BROTHER RELATIONSHIP
WITH LEBANON. FURTHERMORE, WE STRONGLY DOUBT THERE IS ANY
ASSUMPTION IN DAMASCUS THAT IT CAN CONVERT THE LEBANESE INTO
TRUE CONFRONTATION STATE AGAINST ISRAEL. (WHO WATCHING THE
RAPID DISINTEGRATION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY COULD HAVE SUCH
EXPECTATIONS?) FINALLY, WE TOO ASSUME THAT GOL WILL SHORTLY BE
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PUBLISHING MORE DETAILS OF ITS PROGRAM FOR POLITICAL REORGAN-
IZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION. EMBASSY BEIRUT'S PREDICTION WAS
CORRECT: THE DAMASCUS MEETING DID NOT CONSECRATE A COMPLETE
SETTLEMENT (BEIRUT 1241).
MURPHY

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